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Notes

A NOTE ON OLD ENGLISH *FORPĒRAN* AND MIDDLE ENGLISH *FORPĒREN*

The Old English verb *forpĒran* ‘to destroy, ruin’ occurs fourteen times in the *Dictionary of Old English Corpus*, and is primarily attested in the writings of Ælfric of Eynsham (c. 955–c. 1010).¹ A search in this corpus shows that eleven of the fourteen occurrences are indeed found in the works of Ælfric, with the remaining three occurrences appearing in an Ælfrician quotation in an anonymous homily (HomS 28),² another anonymous homily for Rogationtide (HomS 41 [Baz-Cr]), and the Old English translation of Gregory’s *Pastoral Care* (CP).³

Although the *DOE* entry does not include a reference to a related lemma in the *Middle English Dictionary*, the latter dictionary does feature a Middle English verb which is similar to the Old English lemma both in form and meaning: *forpĒren* ‘to impair greatly, to destroy’.⁴ It would appear from its entry in the *MED* that this verb is even rarer than Old English *forpĒran*, since it has only one quotation from the *South English Legendary*, in a manuscript from c. 1300: ‘Louerd, muche is þi mizhte. For, þat þou isaued habbe wolt, noþing ne schal furpere’.⁵ Another instance of this verb in the *South English Legendary* was identified by Autumn Joy Stanley Simmons ‘in the

Legend of St. Margaret, eds. D’Evelyn and Mill EETS *South English Legendary*, vol.235.-I.295/100–01: “Understond of þi nobleie hou gent þou ert and swete/And reu on þi faire bodi þat þou ne forpere no3t””.⁶ This quotation should be added to the *MED* entry for *forpĒren*, since the spelling of the prefix with <ō>, i.e., <forpere>, offers an alternative to <furpere>, the spelling of the verb in the quotation which is currently found in the *MED*.⁷

In a similar fashion to how the *DOE* ignores this seemingly related Middle English lemma, the *MED* does not mention Old English *forpĒran*. Instead, it simply states ‘Cp. empeiren’.⁸ The *MED* also provides ‘Related Dictionary Entries’ for *forpĒren*; two entries are mentioned in this section, which are found in the *Oxford English Dictionary*: ‘for-, prefix’¹, and ‘pair, v.’.¹⁹ It would appear, therefore, that the *MED* sees *forpĒren* as a combination between the root of the verb *empeiren* ‘to make worse; to harm or damage; to become worse’, a borrowing of ‘OF empeirier, empirier’,¹⁰ and the native prefix *for-*. The verb *pair* ‘to make worse’ is, according to the *OED*, an aphetic form of *appair* and its earliest quotation is dated to ‘c 1330’.¹¹ *Appair* and its shortened form share an origin with the verb *impair*, as all three ultimately go back to ‘French *ampairer*, *empeirer*, *enpeirer*’ which is, in turn, derived from ‘the Romance base of in- prefix’³ [...] + the Romance base reflecting post-classical Latin *peiorare*.¹² Theoretically, then, the shortened verb *pair* could have been combined with the prefix *for-*, the latter perhaps in its sense ‘[i]mplying destructive, painful, or prejudicial effect, as in *fordeem* v., *fordo* v.’, so as to intensify the original meaning of *pair*.¹³ This derivation would have resulted in Middle English *forpĒren*.

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¹ *Dictionary of Old English: A to I* online (henceforth *DOE*), ed. Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, Antonette diPaolo Healey et al. (Toronto, 2018), s.v. ‘for-pĒran’. For an overview and analysis of vocabulary associated with Ælfric, see Amos van Baalen, ‘Identifying, categorising and exploring “Ælfrician” vocabulary using the *Dictionary of Old English, A Thesaurus of Old English* and *Evoke*’, in *Exploring Early Medieval English Eloquence: A Digital Humanities Approach with A Thesaurus of Old English and Evoke*, ed. Thijs Porck and Sander Stolk, special issue of *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik*, lxxxi, 3–4 (2021), 384–441.

² The same line occurs in *ÆCHom* I, 14.1.

³ *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus* (henceforth *DOEC*), compiled by Antonette diPaolo Healey with John Price Wilkin and Xin Xiang (Toronto, 2009); search term: ‘forp’.

⁴ *Middle English Dictionary* (henceforth *MED*), ed. Robert E. Lewis et al. (Ann Arbor, 1952–2001), online edition in *Middle English Compendium*, ed. Frances McSparran et al. (Ann Arbor, 2000–2018), s.v. ‘forpĒren v.’.

⁵ *MED*, s.v. ‘forpĒren v.’.

⁶ Autumn Joy Stanley Simmons, ‘Modern English Replacement of Verbal Compounds with For-’, MA thesis, Stanford University (Stanford, 1967), 163. Since Stanford University does not provide full access to this MA thesis due to copyright reasons, I was only able to see part of the page that discusses *forpĒran/forpĒren* via Google Books.

⁷ *MED*, s.v. ‘forpĒren v.’.

⁸ *MED*, s.v. ‘forpĒren v.’.

⁹ *The Oxford English Dictionary* (henceforth *OED*), ed. John Simpson, 3rd edn, online (Oxford, 2000–). There is no lemma **forpair* in the *OED*, which means that the verb probably did not survive past the Middle English period.

¹⁰ *MED*, s.v. ‘empeiren v.’.

¹¹ *OED*, s.v. ‘pair, v.’.

¹² *OED*, s.v. ‘impair, v.’.

¹³ *OED*, s.v. ‘for-, prefix’¹, sense 1.e.i.

However, rather than taking Middle English *forpēren* as a combination between a French-derived verb and the native prefix *for-*, it would be a simpler solution to see it as a direct descendant of Old English *forpāran*, an option that appears to have been overlooked by the editors of both the *DOE* and the *MED*. Old English *ā* corresponds to an e-type vowel in most Middle English dialects (either /e:/ or /e:/), spelled <e>, which makes the phonological derivation of Middle English *forpēren* from Old English *forpāran* fairly uncontroversial.¹⁴ A connection between the two verbs has also been noted by Simmons, who treats both verbs under the headword ‘*forpaeran*, -*peren*’ and explicitly mentions that ‘[t]he MED [...] does not refer it [i.e., *forpēren*] to OE *forpaeran*’.¹⁵ In other words, the etymological information for *forpēren* in the *MED* should be updated, so that the entry mentions the existence of Old English *forpāran*. Likewise, the *DOE* entry for *forpāran* should refer to Middle English *forpēren* as a related lemma.

Even if we assume that Middle English *forpēren* is directly descended from Old English *forpāran*, we are still left with the question of the etymology of the Old English verb. The root of this verb has an initial /p/, which is reasonably rare for Germanic words inherited directly from Proto-Indo-European.¹⁶ Although there seems to be a distinct lack of scholarship on *forpāran*, its salient form was already noticed in the mid nineteenth century by Jacob Grimm (1785–1863). In a letter to John Mitchell Kemble (1807–1857), dated 26 January 1844, Grimm notes the following: ‘In the interesting charter 328 concerning the thief Helmstân, *aparade* occurs (p. 134, l. 12 from the bottom), Lye has *aparod deprehensus*, *forpaeran*

pervertere, the word sounds strange, like all those starting with P’.¹⁷ Grimm is, of course, interested in the form ‘*aparade*’, a form of the verb *aparian* which, according to the *DOE*, does not have the same meaning as *forpāran*, but rather ‘to discover; apprehend’.¹⁸ His quotation of two individual entries from Edward Lye’s (1694–1767) *Dictionarium Saxonico et Gothico-Latinum* suggests that he may have felt that *aparian* and *forpāran* were related.¹⁹ Therefore, his point that ‘the word sounds strange, like all those starting with P’ may equally be applied to both verbs.

It is difficult to ascertain whether a connection between *aparian* and *forpāran* indeed exists: the *DOE* does not cross-reference these verbs in their respective entries, and their senses are perhaps too different (although it should be noted that *aparian* is only attested twice in the *DOEC*).²⁰ Likewise, the entries in the online edition of Bosworth–Toller do not cross-reference each other, nor is there any etymological information about *aparian* or *forpāran*.²¹ Interestingly, the entry for *forpāran* in Bosworth–Toller does contain a cross-reference to an entry ‘*a-pāran*’, which has the meaning ‘to pervert, turn from; evertere, pervertere’.²² However, there are no quotations, and the verb cannot be found in the *DOE* or in the *DOEC*,²³ nor in Clark Hall’s *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*.²⁴ It would seem, therefore, that

¹⁷ *Briefe der Brüder Grimm*, collected by Hans Gürtler, ed. Albert Leitzmann (Jena, 1923), 100; translation my own. Original quote: ‘In der interessanten urkunde 328 von dem dieb Helmstân kommt *aparade* (p. 134 z. 12 von unten) vor, Lye hat *aparod deprehensus*, *forpaeran pervertere*, das wort klingt wie alle mit P anlautenden fremdartig’. The verbs are not mentioned anywhere else in the letter. There is one further letter to Kemble in the edition, dated 15 May 1846, in which the verbs are also not mentioned (101–2). However, Grimm does say that Kemble has not answered the questions of his previous letter, which possibly refers to his comment about ‘*aparade*’, ‘*aparod*’ and *forpāran*.

¹⁸ *DOE*, s.v. ‘*a-parian*’.

¹⁹ Edward Lye, *Dictionarium Saxonico et Gothico-Latinum*, ed. Owen Manning (London, 1772), 1. This idea was perhaps suggested to Grimm by the presence of the entry ‘*Apæran*’ in Lye’s dictionary, which does not feature a definition but simply refers to *forpāran*. For a discussion of *apæran*, see below.

²⁰ *DOE*, s.v. ‘*a-parian*’.

²¹ Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller (henceforth Bosworth–Toller), *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (1882–98), with supplements by T. Northcote Toller (1908–21) and Alistair Campbell (1972) (London), <https://bosworthtoller.com>, s.vv. ‘*forpāran*’, ‘*a-parian*’, ‘*ā-parian*’.

²² Bosworth–Toller, s.v. ‘*a-pāran*’.

²³ Search terms: <apAr>, <aper>, <apar>.

²⁴ J. R. Clark Hall, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*. With a Supplement by Herbert D. Meritt, 4th edn (Toronto, 1960).

¹⁴ R. D. Fulk, *An Introduction to Middle English: Grammar* | *Texts* (Peterborough, ON, 2012), 36–7; for exceptions, see Karl Brunner, *An Outline of Middle English Grammar*, trans. Grahame Johnson (Oxford, 1970), 13; and Richard Jordan, *Handbook of Middle English Grammar: Phonology*, trans. and rev. Eugene Joseph Crook (The Hague, 1974), 75–83.

¹⁵ Simmons, ‘Modern English Replacement’, 163; see footnote 6.

¹⁶ R. D. Fulk, *A Comparative Grammar of the Early Germanic Languages* (Amsterdam / Philadelphia, 2018), 103 and 105, n. 4. The reason for this relative rarity is because ‘it is dubitable whether there was any word-initial *b* in [P[roto-][Indo-][E]uropean]’ (105, n. 4), which, following the operation of Grimm’s Law, leads to a low number of inherited terms with initial *p* in Germanic (see p. 102; for a number of these native terms in Germanic, see p. 103).

‘a-pæran’ is most likely a ghost word. In short, there is no reason to assume that *forpæran* is related to *aparian*. *Forpæran* also does not appear to have any cognates in other Old Germanic languages.²⁵

Returning to the question of the possible etymology of *forpæran*, its root-initial /p/ makes it likely that it is a loanword. If it was indeed borrowed, one possible origin of the root may perhaps involve precisely the Latin verb which ultimately gave us *impair*: *pēiorāre*. Given the fact that there appear to be no cognates in other Old Germanic languages, this verb might have been borrowed at an early stage in the development of Old English, after which it underwent phonological change

and became prefixed with *for-*.²⁶ Whatever the source of Old English *forpæran*, it seems very likely that it is the direct ancestor of Middle English *forpēren*. The etymological information in the *MED*, and the related lemma section in the *DOE*, should be updated to reflect this possible connection.

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²⁵ I have not been able to find any comparable verbs (even disregarding the prefix *for-*) in Vladimir Orel, *A Handbook of Germanic Etymology* (Leiden/Boston, 2003) or Guus Kroonen, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Germanic* (online, 2010), https://dictionaries.brillonline.com/search#dictionary=proto_germanic. Although the verb, together with the ghost word ‘ā-pæran’, is mentioned in Ferdinand Holthausen, *Altenglisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 2nd edn (Heidelberg, 1963), s.v. ‘ā-, for-pæran’, the only information that is given is that it has an ‘unbek[annte] Herk[unft]’ [unknown etymology].

²⁶ It is very difficult to find a parallel case of this phonological development; the (non-exhaustive) ‘overview of Latin loanwords in Old English’ in Philip Durkin, *Borrowed Words: A History of Loanwords in English* (Oxford, 2014), 99–119 does not feature any Latin words with the sequence *-ēio-*.